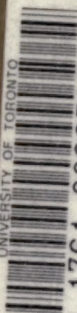
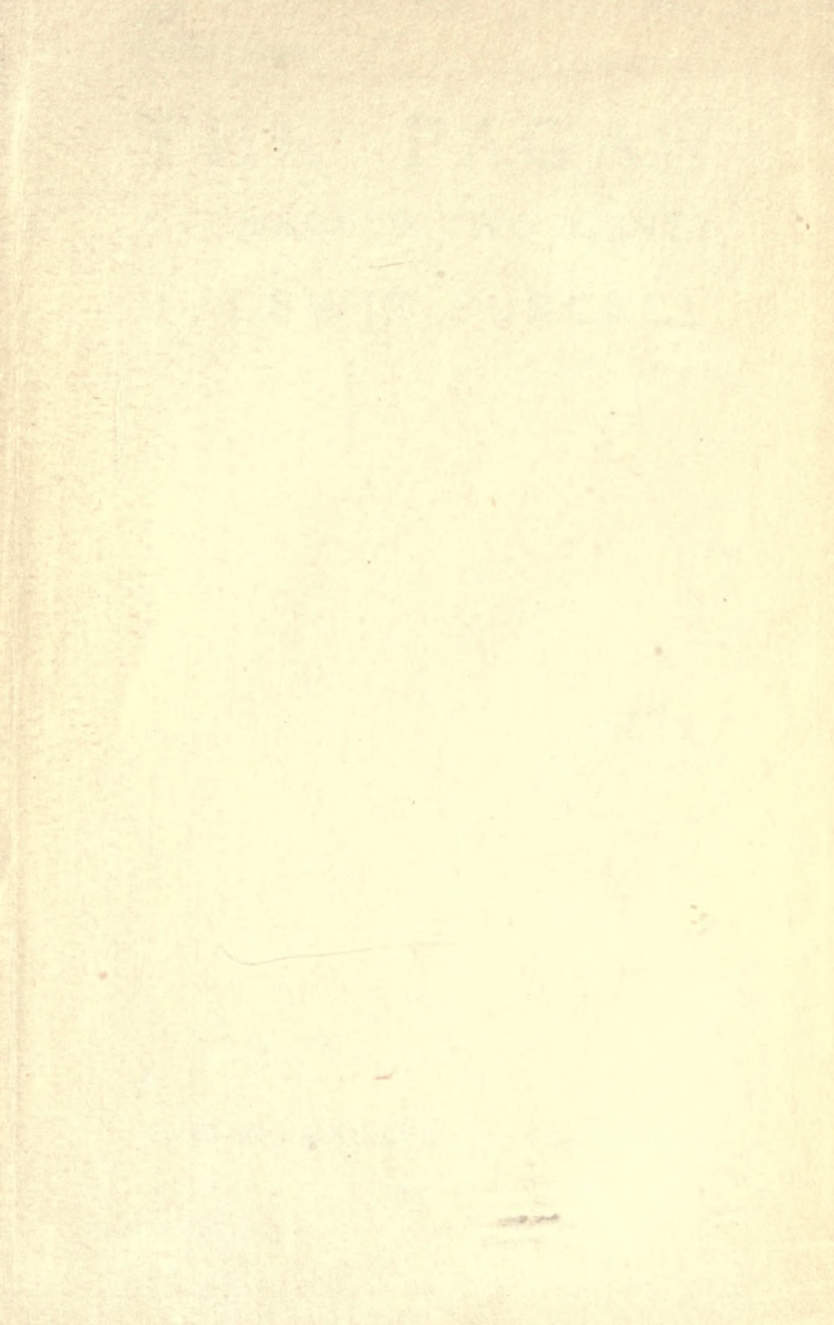


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THE PAGAN

A COMEDY IN TWO SCENES

By LEWIS PURCELL

559749
30 to 3.53

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1907



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This Play was produced in December, 1906, by the
ULSTER LITERARY THEATRE, in Belfast.

CRIMALL RUADH, A petty chieftain of the tribe of Ui Nial.

NUALA, His daughter.

GORMAN MACRORY, A petty chieftain of the Cruithni.

CELLACH, His follower.

TURLOCH, A fighting man.

CONGALL, A bard.

MAELCOVA, A cleric.

FEILECH, A bonds-boy.

In Ulster, about the sixth century.

THE PAGAN.

SCENE I.

Within the enclosure of Crimall Ruadh. On the left is visible part of a house of roughly squared logs, in which there is a narrow doorway. The right side is occupied by a stone structure. At the back there is a low wall, with a suggestion of greater depth on the far side. In this there is an opening approached by two steps. The distant background is mountainous.

NUALA is sitting by the wall, looking into the valley. FEILECH is reclining on the ground, grinding oats in a quern.

NUALA.

I see a hunting party. They are going round the base of the hill.

FEILECH.

He rises and stands beside her.

It is the chief's hunting party. See, they have killed a great red deer—two red deer! Do you see them? They are tied upon the backs of the horses. Ah, if I were a freeman I would go into the woods and be a hunter.

NUALA.

One day you will be a freeman.

FEILECH.

But I want to be a freeman *now*.

THE PAGAN.

NUALA.

Have you ground all the oats? If you have not finished when my father returns he will be angry.

FEILECH.

Ach, it is woman's work grinding oats. I am too old to do woman's work any more.

NUALA.

It is a rest from herding cattle.

FEILECH.

He sits on the ground, beside the quern.

It is cold upon the hills when the mists come up from the river, and often I am wearied running all day to keep the cattle from straying. But it is a man's work herding sheep and cattle. And there is danger too. The wolves are strong, and in the winter they are very fierce. Look where one put his tusks into my arm.

NUALA.

It would be well to finish grinding the oats, Feilech.

There is a pause during which NUALA continues to look into the valley, and FEILECH to turn the quern. Then he ceases and looks up suddenly.

FEILECH.

When I am a man I will run away from your father.

NUALA.

Run away! You will find a worse master.

FEILECH.

He is a good master, but I *will* be a free-man.

NUALA.

You would surely be captured and brought back.

FEILECH.

But I will cross the sea to Alba. They could not find me there.

He rises and lays his finger upon a mark on the wall of the house.

Look, do you see that mark? I carved it with my knife three moons ago. When my head reaches to that I will go.

NUALA.

But if I tell my father of this?

FEILECH.

You would tell him? And you are so beautiful! Ah, I always thought you were like Deirdre. *She* would not have told.

NUALA.

I will not tell him, Feilech. But why did you put the mark at that height?

FEILECH.

Because then I will be man-grown. That is the height of Turloch the fighting man who comes to woo you.

He stands under the mark.

I want only the length of my hand to reach it. It cannot be very far to Alba. On clear days I can almost count from here the trees in its woods.

NUALA.

And what will you do in Alba?

FEILECH.

I will learn the use of arms, and become a renowned champion. I will win a great kingdom for myself in Alba, and—maybe, when I am a chieftain with strong duns and rich herds, I will come back in a great galley, and I will slay Turloch the fighting man in single combat, and take you to be my queen in Alba.

NUALA.

Laughing.

But, if the words of voyagers be true, the women of Alba are much more beautiful than the women of Eire.

FEILECH.

After looking at her a moment.

I do not think so.

NUALA.

But if they are ?

FEILECH.

After a moment's thought.

Then I will not return.

NUALA.

Feilech, you have been listening to the tales of some wandering bard.

FEILECH.

He is not a bard—but how can you tell that I have been listening to the tales of the bards ?

NUALA.

It is easy to know that by your talk. Who has been filling your brain with the exploits of the heroes ?

FEILECH.

If I told you, you would tell my master.

NUALA.

Am I not like Deirdre ?

FEILECH.

I will tell you. It is Dicho the druid that lives in the wood by Carnmoney. One time, before the new gods were born, he was held in high honour at the dun of a chieftain—I forget the name of the dun. But the cheftain embraced the false gods, and the clerics came and Dicho was sent away. But the people come to him secretly, in the night time, and they bring him food and gifts, for he is very old and very wise and versed in all manner of charms and incantations.

NUALA.

Feilech, if my father knew that you visited this druid he would be angry.

FEILECH.

Oh, I go very secretly. But you too have visited the druid.

NUALA.

How do you know that ?

FEILECH.

One time that I was bringing him food from the house of Flann the Brughfer, I saw you. Was it a love potion you went for ?

NUALA.

Laughing.

It was not a love potion.

FEILECH.

You took him gifts ?

NUALA.

I did.

FEILECH.

Then you too worship the new gods only with your lips, but your heart is still with the gods that Dichó serves. Ah, those are my gods. *They* glory in great and noble feats of arms. Tell me, does Turloch worship the new gods—I mean in his heart?

NUALA.

I think he does.

FEILECH.

Thoughtfully.

It is strange for a fighting man to forsake the Gods of Cuchullain and Conchubar.

NUALA.

Feilech, you must not listen to the words of Dichó the druid. You must not go back to him.

FEILECH.

I will.

[He looks a moment down the slope.

I see two men climbing the path from the strand. One of them is your father.

NUALA.

And the other?

FEILECH.

The path runs by the edge of the wood. I cannot see clearly till they gain the open ground. It may be Turloch. It is not Turloch, it is Congall the bard. This is the fourth time in three days that he has been here. He must be a fool to think that you would prefer a bard to a fighting man.

NUALA.

The profession of a bard is most honourable, and Congall is a clever bard.

FEILECH.

Ach, what will his ryhmes avail him against the keen, bright skian of Turloch. They have entered the enclosure. Do not speak about the oats.

He goes, hurriedly. NUALA enters the house.
CRIMALL and CONGALL appear above the low wall and come down the steps.

CRIMALL.

It is true indeed. The gift of sight and of imagination is a great gift, but the gift of expression is a greater. When I am alone upon the hills in the yellow light of the sun or in the pale light of the stars I see many visions and think great thoughts, but I have not the gift of expression.

CONGALL.

Often I am sad at my own efforts when I think of the great poets that my house has given to Eire. Fiachra was the most cunning weaver of a story that was ever known. Kings and champions would sit whole nights listening to his manner of telling the Tain-Bo-Cuailnge, and Berach, his grandson, was a most powerful satirist. It is said of him that when he was a young man he had four rivals in love, and he satirized them. In one hundred and forty poems he satirized them, till the whole world was laughing at them. And at last they went and drowned themselves in the sea.

CRIMALL.

Truly that was a great deed. There are no poets like that now.

CONGALL.

Ah, then there was honour for a bard in Eire. In these days men think more of herds and lands than of the beautiful arts.

NUALA comes out of the house.

CONGALL.

My affection to you, sweet Nuala.

CRIMALL.

My daughter will entertain you till I return.

He goes away. NUALA sits on a bench beside the door. CONGALL stands a moment looking at her in shy hesitation.

CONGALL.

Have you no word to say to me? You know that my soul lives only in these moments when I am near to you.

NUALA.

You promised that you would not make vows of love to me *every* time you came here.

CONGALL.

How can I help it, when you are the most beautiful and the most desirable woman in the world? I can do nothing all day but think of you and make songs in your honour.

He produces a parchment.

I have made another song about you. I sat up all night to engross it upon this sheepskin.

NUALA.

Another one!

CONGALL.

He sits down beside her.

Look, are not these illuminated letters very creditable?

NUALA.

Truly, they are very cunningly wrought. What is it all about ?

CONGALL.

He rises, unrolls parchment, and strikes a heroic attitude.

I will recite it to you.

NUALA.

Ah, to-day I am not in a mood to listen to poetry. To-morrow perhaps you may recite it.

CONGALL sits down, disappointed.

But you may tell me about it if you will.

CONGALL.

Referring to the parchment.

The song commences with a tribute to your nut-brown hair. I say that even if you had no other charms, its alluring, delightful meshes would be sufficient to entangle irretrievably the hearts of all men. I picture the little daisies and the blades of grass struggling before you for the proud honour of being pressed by your delicately shaped and graceful feet. Your hands, for whiteness, I compare to the snowy feathers of the noble swan. Your——

NUALA.

Have you nothing about my eyes ?

CONGALL.

Your eyes ? How could I forget your eyes ? Out of the fifty-four lines of the poem, your eyes occupy——

He counts, with his finger, the lines.

Twenty-seven !—Ah ! the soul enslaving and entrancing

lights and shadows that play in the depths of your nobly calm and steadfast eyes, I compare to the dim blue mists of a summer evening that form and fade in wondrous beauty above the Peaks of Mourne. They are such, I say, that whole hosts would annihilate each other for the reward of even an indifferent glance.

NUALA.

Whole hosts would annihilate each other! That would indeed be renown. You bards would sing of it for a thousand years. Congall, that is the best thing in the poem.

CONGALL.

Putting away the manuscript.

Your mind runs always on deeds of arms. You have no admiration for deeds of intellect. That is why you prefer Turloch to me.

NUALA.

Turloch is indeed a good warrior. I have been told that when his battle fury is upon him he is equal to seven well trained kerns.

CONGALL.

I have given more time to the practice of poetry than to the practice of arms. Yet—

He rises, angrily.

I am no child in the use of weapons, as Turloch may discover.

NUALA.

Now you speak bravely, Congall. But fighting is not in the province of a bard.

CONGALL.

Pleadingly.

Nuala, you are more, much more, to me than poetry. I know that deeds of arms are much more acceptable to you than any songs. Give me but one word of hope and I will devote my life to that end.

NUALA.

That would be great foolishness, Congall.

CONGALL.

You do not know the strength of my love. Tell me that it is returned and all things are possible to me. Listen, if I overcome Turloch in single combat——?

NUALA.

Quickly.

Nay, I will promise nothing.

CONGALL.

Eagerly.

But I may foster in my breast a hope?

NUALA.

Um—it will do no harm to hope.

CONGALL.

Ah, my heart is light and full of gratitude at those sweet words. But to think of the precious months I have wasted in the fruitless making of songs, rather than in the much more acceptable pursuit of hero feats.

CRIMALL enters, holding FEILECH roughly by the shoulder.

CRIMALL.

I care not how tall you are, nor how old, you will do woman's work or any other work that I require you to do.

He looks at the quern.

Not yet the third part of them ground, and you wandering about the hill !

FEILECH.

Master, I caught a young wolf whelp in the forest three days past. I have it tied to the great pillar stone on the brow of the hill, and I went to give it food. I wish to tame it, master. What is the way to tame a wolf whelp ?

CRIMALL.

If you have not ground all the oats by sundown I will give you such a lesson in taming as your bones will remember for many days.

FEILECH sits down and commences to turn the quern.

CONGALL.

Here are two horsemen entering the enclosure. One of them sits painfully as though he were wounded. It is Turloch who is leading them.

They stand a moment looking.

CRIMALL.

It is some wounded hunter who seeks our hospitality. We will go and give him welcome. My daughter, see that the guest-house is prepared.

CRIMALL and CONGALL go.

FEILECH.

To NUALA as she goes out.

You must have told him about the oats. I will *not* come back from Alba.

FEILECH continues to grind. MAELCOVA comes down the steps, walking slowly with bowed head.

FEILECH.

Father, father, I would speak with you.

MAELCOVA.

Speak, my son. If your soul is troubled I will endeavour to set it at rest.

FEILECH.

Father, my soul is troubled with the grinding of oats. Is it not a task for women ?

He rises to his feet.

Look, I want but the length of my hand to be as tall as Turloch the fighting-man.

MAELCOVA.

My son, it is the duty of true followers of the Christ not to despise humble tasks. The grinding of oats is useful and far more noble than the slaying of hosts.

MAELCOVA moves away.

FEILECH.

Father, where are you going ?

MAELCOVA.

I go to walk a short distance, and to meditate.

FEILECH.

Let me go with you, and I also will meditate. Besides, I have forgotten the lesson you taught me yestere'en. I will grind the oats to-morrow.

MAELCOVA.

Come, then.

MAELCOVA and FEILECH go. CRIMALL and GORMAN enter from the opposite side. GORMAN is leaning slightly on CRIMALL's shoulder.

CRIMALL.

Rest a moment. It is still further to the house where you will lodge. There my physician will prepare for you a bath of healing herbs.

GORMAN.

Though I am of the Cruithni, and an ancient enemy of your tribe, yet Gorman MacRory does not quickly forget an act of generosity.

NUALA enters.

CRIMALL.

My daughter, this stranger is Gorman MacRory of the tribe of the Cruithni. A branch swept him from his horse while giving chase to a red deer by the foot of Duvais.

NUALA.

You are welcome to our house.

TURLOCH and CELLACH enter.

CRIMALL.

Ah, here is your follower.

CELLACH.

Master, I have seen to the horses. Now let us see to ourselves—a draught of herbs for you and a bowl of mead for me.

CRIMALL.

That is well said. Come let us go forward.

CRIMALL, GORMAN and CELLACH go. NUALA stands looking after them. TURLOCH, at opposite side, regards NUALA irresolutely.

TURLOCH.

Nuala

NUALA.

Ah, I am weary listening to vows of love.

TURLOCH.

I know that this presumptuous bard finds favour in your eyes and that you have no admiration for deeds of arms.

NUALA laughs.

NUALA.

Truly Congall is a good poet, and his bearing is courtly and pleasing to the eye. He has made another song about me. He compared my hair to—

TURLOCH.

Impatiently.

I do not wish to hear his fulsome rhymes.

NUALA.

It is very agreeable to a woman to have songs made in her honour.

TURLOCH.

What fool could not string words together?

NUALA.

You could not.

TURLOCH.

Will only songs have power to win you?

NUALA.

I go to see that food is prepared for our guest.

She goes away laughing.

THE PAGAN.

TURLOCH.

Solo.

Simple that I was to seek to please her with deeds of arms !

I may not hope to win her for I cannot make songs.

He thinks a moment.

Yet, maybe it is not so hard to learn. I am not poor of brain, for at the chess board I rank in the third degree. By the breath of God, I will show her that Turloch MacDaire can make as good a song as any wretched bard !

CONGALL appears on the steps. He and TURLOCH stand glaring at each other.

CONGALL.

Ah, you are here ?

He descends the steps.

TURLOCH.

There is one too many of us here.

CONGALL.

Laying his hand on his sword.

I agree with that, but—it may be amended.

TURLOCH.

Drawing his sword.

This is a propitious meeting.

CONGALL.

But—not here.

TURLOCH.

Let us go forward to the clearing by the cave where none may disturb us.

CONGALL.

I am at your service.

As they move to go out MAHLCOVA and FEILECH meet them.

MAELCOVA.

Stay, my sons, I like not the black aspect of your brows,
nor the bare skians in your hands.

TURLOCH.

Father, let us pass on.

MAELCOVA.

I know well the cause of your quarrel. This is a barbarous
and a forbidden way to decide disputes. Oh woman,
how great the measure of precious blood thou hast
caused to be spilled ! My sons, come with me, and by
prayer and fasting you shall drive the dark spirit from
your hearts.

MAELCOVA ascends the steps slowly with bowed
head, then stops and looks back at them.
CONGALL and TURLOCH stand a moment in
hesitation. They put up their swords and
follow. FEILECH stands gazing after them.
NUALA enters.

FEILECH.

There are your two champions gone to pray.

NUALA.

To pray !

FEILECH.

It is so. They were going to fight about you, when the
cleric came and led them away.

NUALA.

It is well the cleric found them.

FEILECH.

I do not think so. There would have been a good fight.
It is but right that men should fight for women.

During this speech CELLACH enters.

CELLACH.

May the Gods protect you. Did I hear this boy say that men should fight for women? They do—but should they? Some woman has been at the bottom of all great quarrels. That is what I cannot understand. I think I am the only man in Eire who has never been dragged into a fight by a woman.

NUALA.

You must be a very wise man.

CELLACH.

I am a philosopher. But sometimes I am angry. I was angry just now, and I violated the laws of hospitality by throwing a dish at your master of the table.

NUALA.

You threw a dish at him?

CELLACH.

But I did not hurt him—much. He provoked me. He said that I made a god of my stomach!

NUALA.

A god? Why did he say that?

CELLACH.

I think he has not been used to men who—can eat.

NUALA.

Did he not serve you well?

CELLACH.

Lady, of the quality of the food I have nothing to say but good. For the quality of the mead I have nothing but the highest praise. It was with the quantity that I quarrelled.

NUALA.

Was there not sufficient ?

CELLACH.

Sufficient ? Sufficient certainly—but not enough. I am used with more than sufficient.

NUALA.

Laughing.

You speak plainly.

CELLACH.

I am a plain man. I have no use for my tongue but to say the things that are in my mind.

NUALA.

I will see to it that you shall have no more cause for complaint.

CELLACH.

I thank you. But, tell me, among people of this new faith, is eating one of the sins—I mean eating enough ?

NUALA.

Moderation is one of the virtues.

CELLACH.

Moderation ! The habit of being content with dry bread in the odour of smoking venison ! Ach, I want the best of everything in life, and no stint of it. Moderation ! Ach !

NUALA.

Smiling.

You have indeed put the matter very clearly. You must pardon my father's master of the table on this occasion. I will speak to him myself.

CELLACH.

Tell him, I beseech you, that my stomach is not a Christian stomach, and that it has been used to fair treatment—I see my master approaching. He may need my services. Do not fail to speak to the master of the table.

He goes.

FEILECH.

That is a man that Dicho the druid would like. I will lead him to the hut to-morrow.

NUALA.

I have told you that you must not visit the druid.

FEILECH.

Confidentially.

I was there last night. I told him that you were being wooed by two young men, and I asked him to forecast to me the one who would win you.

NUALA.

And which did he forecast ?

FEILECH.

I do not know. He said, the one who will be slain shall *not* win you. So that one of them must be slain yet.

NUALA.

Feilech, I fear the druid was thinking of the men he used to know in his youth.

GORMAN MACRORY comes down the steps slowly, leaning upon a rough staff.

GORMAN.

Ah, sweet lady, give me your pardon. I fear this is an exclusive portion of your father's enclosure.

NUALA.

You are welcome to rest here, if it please you. I hope the physician cared well for you.

GORMAN sits down.

GORMAN.

He is indeed a skilful healer and deeply versed in the knowledge of herbs. But he says that it will be many days before I may sit upon the back of my horse.

NUALA.

My father has sent a messenger to your people, that they may not fear for your safety.

FEILECH.

I have been told that it was in following a red deer you came by your hurt. Ah, if I were a free man I too would be a hunter. Is it right, do you think, that I should be made to grind oats ?

GORMAN.

It is right that you should obey till you are strong enough to disobey.

NUALA.

That is not the counsel that Maelcova the cleric would give.

FEILECH.

Indeed it is not. He says that the Great God in his wisdom makes one man to be a king and the next to be a slave, and that it is a great sin for me to question the will of God in making me a bondsman.

GORMAN.

A tale to flatter the vanity of kings !

FEILECH.

Ah, that is better wisdom. When do you think I shall be strong enough to do as I please ?

GORMAN.

Perhaps never. There will always be men who are weak in spirit or in arm. These are the men that will be shouldered aside and made to serve the stronger men.

THE PAGAN.

FEILECH.

Feeling the muscles of his arm.

May the gods prosper me in bone and muscle.

NUALA.

To GORMAN.

But I have always been taught to pity the weak and lowly.

GORMAN.

I have been told that this new faith makes a great virtue of pity. If this succeeds I can see in the future a time when the weak and the sickly will be wrapped up and protected by the law of man from the law of nature. And so the race will degenerate—and there is an end of greatness for ever.

The sound of an uproar is heard, and of men laughing.

Listen! That is the voice of Cellach, my follower. He has got into more trouble.

NUALA.

Has he told you how he treated the master of the table?

GORMAN.

He told me of it. Cellach is fonder of feasting than of fighting, and he makes no secret of it. But once his sword is drawn and the battle fury on his brow, I would rather have him at my back than any other three men of my tribe.

The noise is renewed.

FEILECH.

Jumping to his feet.

It may be that I am missing something.

He is about to go, but stands looking out at side.

Here is the cleric coming this way, and he is angry.

MAELCOVA enters and approaches GORMAN.

MAELCOVA.

It is you, sir, that I seek. I have to complain of the conduct of your follower. He has set himself to corrupt the good morality of this house, and to rob it of the quiet peacefulness to which, with so much prayer and labour, I have reduced it.

GORMAN.

How has he done all this ?

MAELCOVA.

He gathered the fighting men about him in the banqueting hall, and, calling with oaths for mead which, in the absence of my master, none dare refuse him, he set the men to drinking, and sang dissolute songs in praise of the stomach and the sword, till I intervened and drove the men to their huts. He must be sent away from here.

CELLACH enters.

CELLACH.

He speaks rightly, master. Let me be sent away from here. It is no place for a man to live.

GORMAN.

Cellach, you have done wrong. You have not respected the customs of the people who have given us hospitality and tended my wound.

CELLACH.

But, master, a man must drink and sing.

GORMAN.

A man must not drink and sing in this place, as it seems
You must obey the custom.

CELLACH.

Black was the luck that gave you your hurt and brought us here. By this time we might have been sitting down in the banqueting hall at home.

GORMAN.

It will not be for long.

CELLACH.

I will obey—but I think it will kill me.

He goes, sadly.

MAELCOVA.

To GORMAN.

I thank you.

To FEILECH.

It is time, boy, that you go to sound the disk for the closing of the outer doors.

MAELCOVA and FEILECH go It has been growing dusk for some time.

NUALA.

Your follower has not been used to quietness such as that of our house.

GORMAN.

Indeed he has not. My house is not quiet. It is full of noise and feasting and the strong voices of strong men. Tell me, do *you* like the quietness of this place.

NUALA.

It is my father's house.

GORMAN.

You would not have it full of life and laughter?

NUALA.

Indeed, noise and movement are very pleasant to me, and often I am dull. But it is my father's house.

A moment later the sound of a gong is heard.

NUALA and GORMAN sit a moment in silence.

Then GORMAN rises.

GORMAN.

It is time that you retire. I will go now to the place where I am to sleep, for the weariness of the day's labour is upon me. May you drink a refreshing draught of sleep, and may the Birds of Angus make music in your dreams.

NUALA.

May the gods make you sleep a sleep of healing.

He moves away, then stops and looks at her fixedly a moment. She gazes at him, half afraid. He comes back a few steps.

GORMAN.

Tell me, girl, are you betrothed to any man?

NUALA half rises and shrinks back, in alarm.

NUALA.

Betrothed? I—I am not betrothed.

He looks at her a moment longer, then goes out. She sinks down upon the seat, trembling. A moment later CRIMALL comes down the steps, yawning and stretching his arms above his head. He looks around.

CRIMALL.

All is well.

He sees NUALA.

Ah, my daughter, why do you sit so long? The night air is chilly. Let us go into the house. I am heavy with sleep.

She puts her arm about his neck. He stops and looks at her anxiously.

See, you are shivering.

They enter the house. Kerns are seen moving to and fro by the walls in the dusk.

SCENE II.

The same place a few weeks later. CELLACH is reclining lazily on the steps, laughing. FEILECH is standing.

CELLACH.

Are you sure, boy, that you saw all this ?

FEILECH.

Oh, I am sure. I chanced to be near and I heard him reciting the poem to her. He said that he made it himself. What are you laughing at ?

CELLACH.

I am laughing at the thought of a fighting man making poems to please a woman.

FEILECH.

My mistress laughed also.

CELLACH.

Ah, she laughed ?

FEILECH.

Why should she not ? It was a very foolish poem. I myself heard it, and I know a good poem almost as well as I know a good hound.

CELLACH.

Um—m ! It was something in his favour that she laughed.

FEILECH.

Turloch did not seem to think so.

CELLACH.

Ach, Turloch knows no more of the ways of women than you yourself know.

FEILECH.

Do *you* know their ways?

CELLACH.

I have studied them. They are strange creatures, strange creatures. Now if she had pretended to think that it was a good poem, and had given him compliments, that would not have been so much in his favour.

FEILECH.

I do not see that at all.

CELLACH.

Do you not know that the more a woman loves a man, the more she wishes to torment him? Your mistress knew that Turloch would not be pleased if she laughed at the poem—so she laughed. That is the way with them all.

FEILECH.

I did not know that.

He thinks a moment.

But she laughs at everyone just the same, and at yourself more than any.

CELLACH.

Ah, that is a different kind of a laugh. Besides, I am not her lover.

He settles himself comfortably in a reclining position.

FEILECH.

Are you going to sleep again?

CELLACH.

Why not? There is nothing to drink, and no fighting to be done.

FEILECH.

Before you sleep tell me, you that know so much of women,
why is my mistress afraid to look your master in the eye ?
Why does the song die upon her lips at his approach ?

As CELLACH ponders this remark his face
gradually assumes an expression of dismay.
Then he sits up suddenly.

CELLACH.

Boy, you have sharp eyes, and you have used them while
I have let the days pass in sleep.

FEILECH.

Ah, there is not much that *I* do not see.

CELLACH.

That is true, and what you say leaves a horrible thought
in my mind.

FEILECH.

It must indeed be a horrible thought. You have the look
of a man going to his death.

CELLACH.

Death ! What I see is worse than a thousand deaths—
Starvation !

He jumps to his feet.

By the spear of Duvtai I must get him away from here.

FEILECH.

Anxiously.

You should not sleep bareheaded in the sun. I knew a
man who went mad that way.

CELLACH.

Walking about excitedly.

Let me think. Let me think.

FEILECH.

A good plan is to plunge the head three times into a measure of cold water.

CELLACH.

Half drawing his sword.

Leave me, I say, or I will plunge my sword three times——

He drives FEILECH off and continues to prance about.

CELLACH.

Perhaps it is not true. After all it may be only the boy's imagination. Yet now I do recall some happenings that would point to its truth.

He sits down again and wipes his forehead.

Ah—h! This is terrible—terrible!

FEILECH enters followed by GORMAN.

FEILECH.

There he is, and his mind is wandering through sleeping bareheaded in the sun. Be careful of him, for I think he is dangerous.

He leaves them.

GORMAN.

What is this I hear? Is your mind wandering?

CELLACH.

Master, I think it is. But not by reason of the sun.

Entreatingly.

Tell me, master, tell me that you are not wooing the lady Nuala.

GORMAN.

By the seven cloaks of the Dagda, but this is fine impertinence!

CELLACH rises and faces him, rebelliously.

CELLACH.

I see by your eyes that it is true. But I tell you, master, your men will not stand it. They will revolt, every one of them—and I will be the first.

GORMAN.

Calm yourself, Cellach, and try to tell me how you think this will affect you and my men.

CELLACH.

Are you so blind with love? Can you not see that it will affect their stomachs?

GORMAN.

Surprised.

Their stomachs!

CELLACH.

If you bring this woman to your house you must bring also her clerics. And they will make it a sin to eat and drink. I tell you, your men will not submit to it.

GORMAN.

Laughing heartily.

Put that foolish thought from your mind, my good Cellach, for be sure that whatever happens I will remain master in my own house.

CELLACH.

Ach, I have heard that tale before. You know as well as I that a woman has a way of doing what she pleases, no matter who calls himself master. Let us go away from this place at once. A few days among your own people will bring you back to reason. Think of your own house, where the mead flows as freely as water here, where song and feasting and good humour fill the place.

GORMAN.

Cellach, I fear that the cleric has but wasted his breath upon you.

CELLACH.

Ach !

CELLACH looks a moment to side. Then he catches GORMAN by the arm.

CELLACH.

Come away.

GORMAN.

Looking also.

It is the lady herself who approaches. Leave me. I wish to speak with her alone.

CELLACH stands a moment in hesitation, then he goes up the steps and off with a show of anger. NUALA enters.

GORMAN.

Lady, I would speak with you.

NUALA stops and waits silently.

You remember the words I spoke to you seven days past ?

NUALA.

I remember.

GORMAN.

It is time that you gave me an answer.

NUALA.

You have had my answer many times.

GORMAN.

That answer, lady, is not to my liking.

NUALA.

It is my answer. So do not vex me any more with your vows. Remember, I have but to speak, and my father's spearmen will not be held back.

GORMAN.

Your father's spearmen !

He laughs in derision.

I think that, if you do not change your mind, your father's spearmen shall be given their opportunity.

NUALA.

Those are the words of a barbarian.

GORMAN.

It may be so. I have not been reared in any school of soft speaking. I am more at my ease before the sword of an enemy than before the eyes of a woman. Yet I am no coward before either.

NUALA.

Is it not the part of a coward to embarrass a woman with attentions, against her will ?

GORMAN.

I do not know. I only know that I have been used to get what I set my heart upon. And I have chosen you to be my wife.

NUALA.

Are the women of your tribe content to be wooed in this fashion ?

GORMAN.

I cannot tell. You are the only woman I have ever chosen for that honour.

NUALA.

Honour !

GORMAN.

It is an honour for a woman of the Ui Nials to wed with a man of the Cruithni.

NUALA.

Laughing derisively.

An Ui Nial can only answer such words by a laugh.

GORMAN.

Will you answer this also by a laugh?

He approaches her, speaking with determination.

The messenger who came to me yestere'en bore back with him to my people the command to prepare a marriage feast in my house.

[GORMAN goes. NUALA sits down, nervous and trembling. CRIMALL enters.

CRIMALL.

Where is that boy? His laziness grows greater with every day that passes, in spite of my warnings. I will talk to him no longer.

NUALA.

Father, sit down by my side, I wish to speak with you.

[CRIMALL sits by her side.

CRIMALL.

My daughter, what has come over you of late? You are not lighthearted, as you used to be.

NUALA.

It is nothing. But give me your promise that you will do what I ask.

CRIMALL.

Have you not golden ornaments enough?

NUALA.

It is not golden ornaments that I want.

CRIMALL.

As for robes, you have more than any woman of your class—

NUALA.

I do not want gifts of any kind. Listen, I want you to tell me—your love story.

CRIMALL.

My love story ?

NUALA.

You never speak to me of my mother. I only know that she was beautiful.

CRIMALL.

She was—very beautiful.

NUALA.

Tell me how you met her, how you wooed her, how you won her.

A pause, during which CRIMALL sits wrapped in thought.

Father !

CRIMALL.

Rising.

I will tell you of that at some other time.

NUALA rises, takes his hand and leads him back to the seat.

NUALA.

Father, I am a woman now. I have a right to ask.

CRIMALL.

My child, you would not understand. That was in the bad old days, when I laughed at the new faith of gentleness and peace. When a strong arm knew no law but a stronger.

NUALA.

I am listening.

CRIMALL.

You know that your mother was not of the Ui Nials. She was of the Cruithni.

NUALA.

Of the same tribe as Gorman MacRory ?

CRIMALL.

Of the same tribe. That is why I am glad to be able to do him a service.

NUALA.

And how did you come to wed with a woman of that tribe.

CRIMALL.

The land of love has no merings, my child. In my youth I was a great hunter. And one day we wandered far into the south of Dalriada, where it was dangerous for an Ui Nial to hunt.

NUALA.

Ah, I understand. Those were great days indeed.

CRIMALL.

They were bad days, my child. It is not right to wish them back.

NUALA.

Did you meet with a band of robbers who had my mother prisoner, and rescue her, and——

CRIMALL.

Hush, curb your imagination. Nothing like that happened. A snow storm came upon us, a very fierce storm, and we might all have perished had not the gods led us to the door of a dun——

NUALA.

The gods, my father !

CRIMALL.

Confused.

As I thought, my child, as I thought at the time. But surely it must have been the God of heaven who led us. It must surely. We claimed hospitality, and found shelter till the storm had passed. It was there that I saw your mother.

NUALA.

Then the Cruithni were not always our enemies.

CRIMALL.

They were, always.

NUALA.

But how——?

CRIMALL.

Remember Nuala that all this happened in the old days.

NUALA.

Impatiently.

I know, I know.

CRIMALL remains silent, looking at the ground,
as if overcome by painful memories. NUALA
puts her arms about his neck.

CRIMALL.

In a quiet voice.

I carried her away by force. I slew one of her lovers—
and I wounded her father.

NUALA.

Ah!

CRIMALL.

Afterwards there was much bloodshed.

NUALA.

Clinging to his arm.

My father!

CRIMALL.

There, be calm. I should not have told you. Do not let
your mind dwell upon such deeds.

NUALA.

I—I am afraid.

CRIMALL.

But it all happened long ago.

They remain seated thus a moment. GORMAN enters.

GORMAN.

Your pardon—

He is about to pass on.

CRIMALL.

Rising.

Stay. I hope your wound is improving.

GORMAN.

Thanks to the skilful attention that I have received here,
it is all but well.

CRIMALL.

No thanks are necessary in return for a common act of
hospitality.

GORMAN.

It has been such that I shall not quickly forget. But
to-morrow I leave the shelter of your house with the
hope that some day I may receive you in mine.

He laughs.

I mean as a guest, in peace.

CRIMALL.

Laughing also.

I think it will be long before I knock at your gates in any
other guise. There is no question at issue between our
clans.

GORMAN.

Looking thoughtfully at NUALA.

No.

NUALA rises quickly and lays her hand on
her father's arm.

NUALA.

Father, I have more to say to you. Come.

They go out. GORMAN stands looking after them. CELLACH enters from the other side.

CELLACH.

There you stand looking after her, utterly regardless of the bodily welfare of your clansman.

GORMAN.

Enough of this. If you do not like the prospect you are at liberty to offer your services to another master.

CELLACH.

Astonished.

Offer my services to another master? Now I *know* that you have lost your reason, and I see my duty clearly. It is to take you home under a strong guard, and to keep you there until you have recovered it.

GORMAN.

You let this thing occupy your mind too much.

CELLACH.

How can I help it? It is serious enough. I am thinner already at the thought of it.

He sits down, takes his head between his hands, and sighs heavily. MAELCOVA enters.

GORMAN.

There is your charge, sighing over his sins.

GORMAN goes, smiling. MAELCOVA approaches CELLACH.

MAELCOVA.

My son, I see that your soul is cast down.

CELLACH.

My soul is cast down, indeed, and with good reason.

MAELCOVA.

Tell me your troubles and I will try to help you.

CELLACH.

Ach, you cannot help me. Can you make an insane lover listen to reason ?

MAELCOVA.

Surprised.

Are you in love ?

CELLACH.

I ? In love ? Do I look like a man who would fall in love ?

MAELCOVA.

Indeed you do not.

CELLACH.

I am not a fool. I am a philosopher.

MAELCOVA.

Will you not tell me your trouble ?

CELLACH.

I will not, for you could never understand.

After a moment's thought.

Yet, if you will answer me a question it may help me.

MAELCOVA sits down beside him.

MAELCOVA.

Open your heart to me, my son.

CELLACH.

I want you to tell me the qualities that a Christian maid admires in a lover.

MAELCOVA.

That is a strange question to put to a holy man. Have you the intention to woo a Christian maid

CELLACH stares at him in amazement.

CELLACH.

How can you ask such a question ? That is one of the things I would *not* do.

THE PAGAN.

MAELCOVA.

It would be well for you to do so.

CELLACH.

It is a fearful thought. But tell me what I ask.

MAELCOVA.

I will try to tell you.

He considers a moment.

The qualities which a maid should admire in a lover are, above all, the qualities of gentleness—thoughtfulness, peacefulness—devotion and piety.

CELLACH.

And poetry ? What about poetry ?

MAELCOVA.

She would, of course, admire all the peaceful arts.

CELLACH.

Of course she would. Let me see.

He ticks off the points upon his fingers.

Gentleness—no ; thoughtfulness—perhaps ; peacefulness—no ; devotion—surely ; piety—no ; poetry—not a shred. Why, he has not a chance.

He becomes serious.

That is, if he leaves it to the maid to choose.

MAELCOVA.

Rising.

I believe you have been drinking too much heady mead.

MAELCOVA goes. CELLACH remains seated, still ticking off the points upon his fingers. NUALA enters closely followed by TURLOCH.

NUALA.

Ah, Cellach——

CELLACH rises, glares at her a moment, then goes, abruptly, without speaking.

NUALA.

That is strange. There are few men who run away at my approach.

TURLOCH.

Bitterly.

The wise ones, who fear your thralldom.

NUALA.

Now, I will hear no more.

TURLOCH.

Let me speak. I only wish to set your mind at rest. I know that you fear for the safety of this bard. It has come to your ears that we were about to engage in combat.

NUALA.

But fortunately Maelcova, the cleric, intervened.

TURLOCH.

That is true. So cast the fear from your heart. I have given the cleric my vow.

NUALA.

That is a great thing you have done, and your soul will surely benefit. But still your aspect is not cheerful.

TURLOCH.

How can I be cheerful when I know that you prefer Congall ? I have no more hope. I cannot make songs.

NUALA.

The song that you made was not so bad—for a fighting man.

TURLOCH.

If you think so, why did you laugh at it ?

NUALA.

How could I help laughing when you compared my eyes
to those of a cow ?

TURLOCH.

Earnestly.

But I protest that the eyes of a cow are the most tender
and the most contemplative of the eyes of any animal
that I know. Now, if I had compared your eyes to
those of a fawn you would not have been angry. Yet,
wherein lies the difference between the eyes of a fawn and
those of a cow ?

NUALA.

I cannot say. But I know that Congall would never have
compared my eyes to those of a cow.

TURLOCH.

Prancing about.

Ach, Congall, Congall. Always Congall !

NUALA.

Anger and jealousy are not Christian virtues.

TURLOCH.

Give me your pardon. I will be calm. And I will try to
make a better poem.

NUALA laughs to herself.

TURLOCH.

Why do you laugh now ?

NUALA.

I was thinking how Congall would criticise your poem.

TURLOCH.

Angry.

For three days and three nights I have struggled with words as never saint struggled with devils, and all my reward is a heartless laugh! Laugh on, laugh on. It is such laughter that may free my soul at last from the pitiless dominion of your beauty.

He rushes up the steps, and off, furiously.

FEILECH enters from same side, looking back at TURLOCH.

FEILECH.

Turloch is angry, that is good. There will be a fight after all.

NUALA.

Why do you say that?

FEILECH.

Listen, I came to tell you of what I saw as I came through the wood of Cromac, where I have snares laid for wild rabbits.

NUALA.

What did you see?

FEILECH.

In a place which was cleared of trees, I saw Congall, the bard, alone, and he practising feats of arms. I watched him secretly. He will soon be expert and then he will fight with Turloch. Oh, Dichu the druid is wise, and his prophecy will come true yet.

NUALA.

They will not fight.

FEILECH.

Oh, yes ; I think they will. When I told Congall that Turloch had made a song he laughed and said that he would satirize him in a poem. When I told Turloch of this he swore that he would break his oath and slay Congall. Oh, I think they will fight.

He looks out to side.

Here is Cellach coming this way.

NUALA.

He behaves very strangely.

FEILECH.

Hush. His mind is rambling. Do not speak.

CELLACH enters slowly ; his head bowed as if in deep thought. He seems about to pass on, but turns and approaches NUALA.

CELLACH.

Lady, you will be sorry to hear that you are the cause of much contention on the playing green.

NUALA.

Contention ?

CELLACH.

Turloch and Congall are there at this moment. They are engaged in a hot dispute, and their hands are upon their sword-hilts.

FEILECH.

Springing to his feet.

Where ? On the playing green ?

He runs off eagerly.

NUALA.

Do you think they will fight ?

CELLACH.

Gravely.

They will fight, and it will be a mortal combat. The grass will be red. It is not right that a Christian maid should be the cause of bloodshed.

NUALA.

Calmly.

How can *I* prevent it?

CELLACH.

It is easy to see how you can prevent it. You can put an end to the quarrel forever.

NUALA.

Tell me how I can do that.

CELLACH.

You must become betrothed to one of them at once.

NUALA.

Surprised.

At once?

CELLACH.

Eagerly.

There is no time to lose. One of them may be dead already. Now, which of them do you prefer?

NUALA.

Laughing.

That is a question difficult to answer.—But, what do you say to——

CELLACH.

Turloch? Eh?

NUALA nods her head.

My own choice exactly! Now, if I were a woman I would not hesitate a moment to choose.

THE PAGAN.

NUALA.

Interrupting quickly.

No, no ; I meant—What do you think of Congall ?

CELLACH.

Um—m ! Congall !

He considers a moment.

Indeed, now I think of it, I believe Congall is the best.—

In fact I am sure of it. His fame as a bard has spread through all the land.

NUALA.

I did not know that.

CELLACH.

He sits down beside her.

Besides he is more gentle than Turloch, and more—thoughtful, and——and more peaceful, and more devoted and far, far more pious. I give you my assurance that he is.

NUALA.

If what you say is true he is a saint.

CELLACH.

Confidentially.

I think he is—and he loves you.

NUALA.

Has Congall sent you here to woo me for him ?

CELLACH.

He has not. I am giving you this advice for your own sake. The world is full of wicked men who would not make good husbands. Men like myself, and—like Gorman MacRory, my master.

NUALA.

Amused.

Are you so bad as that?

CELLACH.

Solemnly.

We are very wicked. But my master is the worst. No man in all the world is less—gentle than he is, and less thoughtful, and less—peaceful and less devoted. And he has not so much piety as would lie on the point of a spear. May the gods protect the woman that he takes for his wife!

NUALA.

May they, indeed, if this be true.

CELLACH.

He would make her perform menial duties; he would make her wear coarse and sombre robes; he would forbid her the use of golden ornaments, and—I think—I am *sure* that he would drag her by the hair round the enclosure if she ever made a complaint.

NUALA.

Is he so cruel?

CELLACH.

Cruel? The groans of the dying are like sweet music in his ears. He thinks no more of striking the head off a man than off a stock of wild barley.

NUALA.

This is terrible, terrible.

She remains a moment in reflection.

Yet now I *do* remember having heard accounts of your master that were much to his discredit.

CELLACH.

Surprised.

You heard what ?

NUALA.

Watching him.

Yes. Tales of his savage cruelty—and wickedness
—and debauchery, and——

CELLACH springs to his feet, and half draws
his sword.

CELLACH.

Who was the foul liar that told you this ?

He approaches her, threateningly.

His name, woman, his name. And if he be still within
the four seas of Eire I swear to give the ravens *such*
a feast ! My master cruel, and debauched, and——

He becomes conscious that NUALA is shaking
her finger at him, and laughing.

NUALA.

Now I know that you yourself do not believe a word of
what you told me. Oh, Cellach, you are not at all
clever.

He allows himself to be drawn down on the
seat beside her.

Come, why have you told me all this concerning your
master ?

CELLACH remains silent, conscious that he has
been trapped.

NUALA.

I like you.

He moves sullenly to the end of the seat.

CELLACH.

You forget that I am a philosopher. I am not subject to
the wiles of woman.

NUALA.

Why do you not like me ?

CELLACH.

I—I do like you, but—Oh, if only you had been brought up properly !

NUALA.

Brought up properly ? You will need to speak more plainly.

CELLACH.

Then I *will* speak plainly. Tell me, if you wed with a man who held to his gods, would you bring your clerics to his house ?

NUALA.

Starting back.

Ah, now I understand.

CELLACH.

Impatiently.

Your answer.

NUALA.

It is not necessary. My answer can make no difference to you.

CELLACH.

No difference ! It will make all the difference between the banqueting hall of your father and that of my master.

NUALA.

Smiling.

I can give you my assurance that no change shall ever come to the customs of your banqueting hall through me——

CELLACH.

Quickly, and rising to his feet.

Good ! I will keep you to your word.

NUALA.

Because I will never——

CELLACH.

Ignoring the speech, and going to the steps.

I will keep you to your word. I will keep you to your word.

GORMAN enters. NUALA rises, in alarm. She is about to go, but GORMAN stays her with a motion of the arm.

GORMAN.

Go, Cellach, and bring our horses.

CELLACH.

Are we going away ?

GORMAN.

To-day I will ride the stiffness out of my bones. Tomorrow we will journey towards our home.

CELLACH.

Master, now I care not how soon.

He goes.

GORMAN.

To NUALA.

You heard what I said ?

NUALA.

Nervously.

I heard.

GORMAN.

Is your answer still the same ?

NUALA retreats to the door of the house.

NUALA.

It is.

GORMAN.

I have no wish to carry you away by force. But——

He catches her by the wrist. She gives a cry of alarm, struggling.

listen, if you do not come of your own free will to-morrow, I will return. Do you understand?

CRIMALL enters. He stands looking, in angry amazement. GORMAN releases NUALA and faces him.

CRIMALL.

What is the meaning of this?

GORMAN.

I offered to your daughter the honour of the name of MacRory.

CRIMALL draws his sword and advances threateningly. GORMAN remains unmoved.

CRIMALL.

Without my permission? Under the protection of my hospitality?

GORMAN.

Why should I waste my breath by asking for your consent? You are of the Ui Nials, I am of the Cruithni.

MAELCOVA enters hurriedly.

CRIMALL.

By the Cross of the Christ, I will punish such impertinence.

GORMAN.

Let the punishment begin.

He draws his sword.

MAELCOVA.

My children, my children.

He lays a restraining hand upon CRIMALL's arm.
He is your guest. You cannot draw your sword upon him
in your own house.

CRIMALL.

To GORMAN.

Then out of my house, as quickly as you can.

GORMAN.

I am not used to be so ordered. It is a great pity, indeed,
that I am your guest this moment.

CRIMALL.

That is a difficulty that may be overcome. I shall consider
you beyond the bounds of my hospitality when you have
passed the belt of thorns at the foot of the hill, and I
shall have the right to follow you.

GORMAN.

Let it be so.

NUALA.

Clinging to him.

My father!

CELLACH enters.

CELLACH.

The horses are ready—but what is this? I smell a
fight. The gods be thanked, for I am growing stiff with
so much idleness.

GORMAN.

Keep your sword in its sheath—yet.

He approaches NUALA.

May the gods protect you, sweet Nuala, till they give you
into my keeping.

CRIMALL starts forward angrily.

GORMAN.

Come, Cellach, to horse for the south.

CELLACH.

Alone ?

GORMAN goes up the steps and off without answering. CELLACH stands looking after him in astonishment, then at NUALA.

CELLACH.

This is a thing I cannot understand.

He follows shouting.

Master, Master.

NUALA throws her arms about her father's neck.

MAELCOVA.

Crimall Ruadh, you will not follow him.

CRIMALL.

By the God of heaven, I will.

NUALA.

My father, do not go. Do not go.

CRIMALL.

You would have me play the coward ?

NUALA sinks down on the seat, weeping.

MAELCOVA.

They have reached the belt of thorns.

He starts and remains a moment looking, anxiously.

But—they have dismounted. God of heaven, they are waiting for you there !

CRIMALL goes over to the wall.

CRIMALL.

They are waiting, as you say. Come, holy man, and give me your blessing ere I go.

MAELCOVA.

Sadly.

I cannot dissuade you from this mad enterprise. Come.

They go. NUALA ceases to weep. She crosses quickly to the steps, where she stands gazing fixedly into the valley. FEILECH enters, excited and jubilant.

FEILECH.

Turloch and Congall have drawn their swords at last. Congall is wounded—but not much. I do not understand that. Dicho, the druid, said that one of them would be slain.

He stops, seeing that NUALA is not listening.
He follows the direction of her gaze.

It is Gorman MacRory and his follower. Why do they stand yonder beside their horses, like men on guard?

NUALA.

Absently.

Go into the house and bring me——my cloak.

FEILECH.

Which cloak do you want?

NUALA.

Any cloak.

FEILECH looks at her a moment, curiously, and goes into the house. NUALA glances quickly about her; then she runs up the steps and disappears. After a moment FEILECH comes out, carrying a cloak.

FEILECH.

Will this one do ?

He looks about him ; then he goes to the steps. He gives a cry of surprise and drops the cloak.

Master ! Master !

CRIMALL and MAELCOVA come running at once. Then TURLOCH and CONGALL enter, out of breath and dishevelled.

Look, it is my mistress. They are coming to meet her.

CRIMALL stands gazing, horrorstruck, into the valley, with his hand to his forehead.

CONGALL.

She has reached them.

TURLOCH.

God ! They have all ridden away.

CRIMALL.

The horses, the horses !

He draws his sword and rushes out, followed by TURLOCH and CONGALL. MAELCOVA remains unmoved. FEILECH is confused and undecided ; then he runs into the house and comes out carrying a spear. He is about to follow when MAELCOVA puts a hand upon his shoulder, restraining him. They stand thus looking into the valley.

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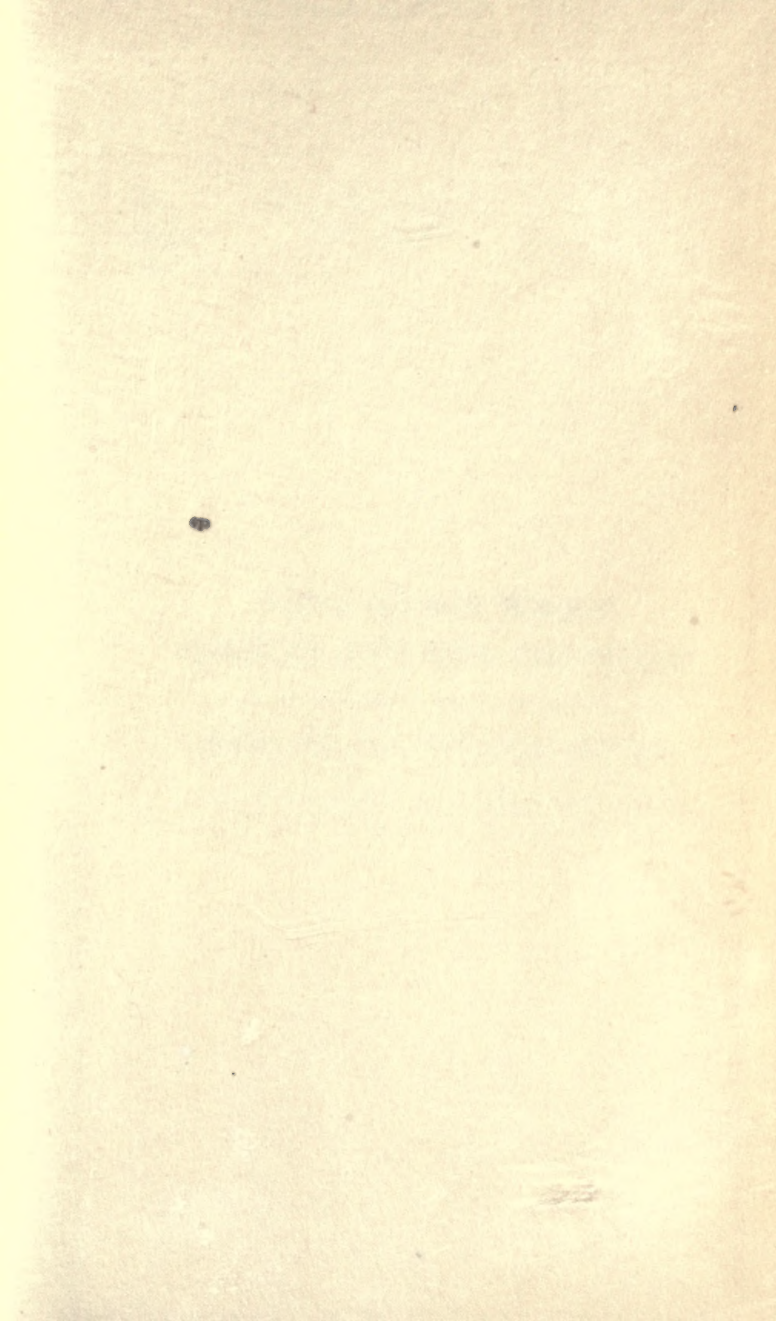
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